

Documents on Diplomacy: Introduction

Interpreting a Primary Source Document

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“The length of this document defends it well against the risk of its being read.” — Winston Churchill

Standard:

- I. Culture
- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environments
- IV. Individual Development and Identity
- V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
- VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
- IX. Global Connections
- X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives:

The student will:

- Determine the purpose of a primary document
- Analyze the major ideas of a primary document
- Evaluate the key terms and historical use of language
- Place the document in an historical context
- Relate to other documents of the same or different eras

Time: 1-2 class periods

Materials: Documents: Any document in *Documents on Diplomacy* or any other document!

Resources: Images, film clips, artwork, music—anything that will enhance your presentation

Exercises: Any *This Says What?*

Procedures:

Setting the Stage

Primary source documents are the heart of history. Students should possess the skills to evaluate cartoons, speeches, treaties, dispatches, letters, images, telegrams, and film clips—to name just a few. Sometimes the documents are relatively short and to the point. But other times—as Winston Churchill points out—the documents can be very long. Whatever their length or difficulty (or potential for boredom!), *students should be exposed to primary sources*. It is the responsibility of the teacher to integrate different types of primary source materials into the study of history.

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce a “generic” lesson format to use with ANY document. If time does not permit the use of a full lesson or multiple documents, any one document can be used as a “stand alone” activity at the teacher’s discretion.

- 1.** Provide the selected document to students.
- 2.** Provide the exercise, *And This Says What?*
- 3.** Have students work individually (even for homework), in pairs, or in groups.
- 4.** Allow enough time for them to read the document and complete the exercise.
- 5.** Discuss the findings of the students. ■

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And This Says What?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Genre of Document (treaty, letter, speech, cartoon, painting, etc.)

B. Date:

C. Author:

D. Intended Audience:

PURPOSE(S)

A. Why was this primary source created?

B. Was it intended for public or private (even secret) reading?

C. Does it reveal first-hand observations at the time of or after the event?
Is this a second-hand account?

D. What is revealed about the authors?

CONTENT ANALYSIS

- A.** Identify the main ideas of the document.
- B.** Explain the historical context of the document.
- C.** Give examples of how the language used reveals the document's historical period.
- D.** What evidence is provided by the author(s) to support the main ideas and intent of the primary source?
- E.** Is the document persuasive, informative, objective, or biased? Is it more than just one of these? Cite examples.
- F.** Are there key words that emphasize the intent of the author(s)? Are they repeated? Why would this be done?

FINAL THOUGHTS

- A.** How is this source valuable or influential to history?
- B.** Relate to other documents of the same historical period or other eras.
- C.** What potential changes in the document might have resulted in a greater historical impact?
- D.** What questions would you ask of the author(s) regarding the document?